

VZCZCXRO5696
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #1732 1441545
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 241545Z MAY 07
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1367
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 001732

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/23/2017

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: SHI'A OFFICIALS VOICE CONCERN OVER EVENHANDEDNESS
OF MNF IN DIYALA

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) CoR members Qassim Daoud and Taha Dera (both Solidarity Bloc, Shi'a coalition) discussed with the Ambassador on May 21 their concerns about the evenhandedness of MNF in Diyala. Daoud told the Ambassador that Ayatollah Sistani's "representative" had recently asserted during Friday prayers that there was "cooperation" between MNF and Baathists and Al-Qaeda in Diyala. (Note: Daoud later identified the imam as Mehdi al-Karbala'e in Karbala. End note.) Dera elaborated on several concerns, alleging, for example, that (1) MNF did not protect villages in Diyala that were targeted by terrorists but instead raided villages where no terrorists existed; (2) MNF had released a terrorist captured by ISF; and (3) MNF had detained several Shi'a, but not Sunni, officials and ISF officers. He handed the Ambassador a paper outlining several additional alleged causes for concern, noting that the marja'iyah took note of these incidents. What was needed, Dera claimed, was "a better understanding by MNF of how to deal with the local population." Daoud also noted that "people were asking" whether the continued presence of the MEK was also somehow part of U.S. political calculations.

12. (C) The Ambassador told Daoud and Dera that there was absolutely no basis for claims that MNF would cooperate with al-Qaeda or Baathists. Pointing out that many U.S. soldiers had died fighting al-Qaeda, he asked how a representative of Sistani could make such an assertion and urged Daoud to relay his response to Sistani's representative and note to him that assertions like the one he made help al-Qaeda. He told Daoud that the U.S. considered the MEK a terrorist organization and that the Embassy and MNF were studying ways of resolving the issue of Camp Ashraf. The Ambassador noted to Dera that mistakes sometimes are made in the heat of a battle but that the goal of MNF was to fight terrorists and those outside the law in Diyala, in coordination with the GOI and with Diyala citizens. Stressing the importance of open communication, he thanked Dera for his paper and assured him that the Embassy and MNF would study it and respond.

As Do South-Central Governors

13. (C) In a meeting on May 22 with the governors of the five south-central provinces, the governor of Najaf, seconded by the governor of Karbala, also expressed concern to the Ambassador about the situation in Diyala. There were many Shi'a families in Najaf displaced from Diyala, he said, and these IDPs were "afraid of the U.S. because they think you are with the Sunnis." The Ambassador assured the governor that MNF was committed to fighting terrorists in Diyala and that within days additional troops would be arriving there. The governor thanked the Ambassador for his explanation and said he would relay it to the Diyala IDP community in Najaf.

Comment

¶4. (C) The idea that MNF favors any sect over another in Diyala or anywhere else is, of course, wrong. Given the extent to which the perception that MNF is "with the Sunnis" appears to have spread among Shi'a constituencies, however, it is important to address the perception directly. The Embassy and MNF plan to study the specific concerns raised in Dera's note and respond in writing in a way that can be made public. End comment.
CROCKER